STREET SPIRIT

Volume 16, No. 08 August 2010 $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

PETRA Spells the Death of Public Housing

by Lynda Carson

The Obama administration is championing a proposal called PETRA, or the Preservation, Enhancement and Transformation of Rental Assistance Act. PETRA is the most extreme right-wing shift in housing policies since the inception of public housing in 1937.

Despite already being rejected by Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Congressman Barney Frank and thousands of public housing residents across the nation, during July three special forums to promote PETRA on behalf of the Obama administration took place in Washington, D.C.

If Congress enacts PETRA into law, public housing programs across the nation may be terminated, and our nation's public housing units for the poor, elderly and disabled, will be privatized, sold off, and converted into market-rate housing developments for mixed-income communities.

In addition to terminating public housing programs across the nation, PETRA is a piece of anti-homeless legislation, because the Obama administration is planning to give Section 8 vouchers to the 1.2 million public housing households that may be displaced from their housing once PETRA goes into effect.

Public housing residents would be bumped to the head of the line in front of all the homeless families already waiting for Section 8 vouchers that are needed to end homelessness, and those in the waiting lists may remain homeless for years longer as a direct result.

PETRA and the Privatization of Public Housing in Berkeley

The scheme to privatize and sell Berkeley's 75 public housing units has stalled, and at present, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has not completed its review of the disposition plan filed with HUD to dispose of Berkeley's public housing. Around December 31, 2009, the Berkeley Housing Authority (BHA) filed an application with HUD to dispose of its public housing units, and expected HUD approval of the scheme in 90 days. HUD approval has not yet occurred.

The City of Berkeley plans to sell its public housing units to nonprofit housing developers, and the BHA plans to finance the privatization of Berkeley's public housing by looting the Section 8 program.

The developers plan to convert the units into the Section 8 Project-Based voucher program, a program for landlords in the private housing sector that allows landlords to charge above-market-rate rents to the poor. The units will be subsi-

See **PETRA Spells the End** *page 6*



"HOLIDAY HOME Luke 16: 25" Painting by Jos Sances, 33" x 33"

A homeless man finds no home in this scene reminiscent of Thomas Kinkade's art. Market-rate housing means mansions for the wealthy, shopping carts for the poor.

Life in the Slow Lane

An Old Man, A Van and His Dog

by Robert L. Terrell

I recently interviewed the old man who lives with a large dog in a battered, old van on the south end of my block. He said he has been living in the van here in San Francisco for 10 years, and he has spent the past two of those years in this rapidly gentrifying South of Market neighborhood.

When I initially noticed him several years ago, he had two dogs. It took me several months to figure out that he was homeless, and additional months to ascertain that he lives in the old, gray van. At that time, he moved the van every couple days, but always within a radius of three or four blocks.

When he first arrived on this block, he continued his practice of moving the van every few days. But with the passage of time, the moves became less frequent. These days he rarely moves the van.

I assume the dogs liked this block, because they quickly became territorial, challenging anyone who walked too close to the parked van with hostile growls, bared fangs and frighteningly powerful lunges, held back only by a slender tether tied to the van's battered bumper.

The weathered old man has obviously seen much better times. His gait is slow, his clothes threadbare and his body language suggests that he is slowly running out of energy.

During the two years he has lived on this block, I have never seen him visited by a relative, friend or acquaintance. And even though he is surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people, his is an extremely lonely existence.

When I plied him with questions about his future, his eyes darkened and his facial expression conveyed profound uncertainty. His is an interesting tale and I want to share some of it here. But I want to do so within context of the times in which we live, and the escalating tragedy unfolding

See **Life in the Slow Lane** *page 5*



Framed. **Although he is living a difficult life as a homeless vehicle dweller in San Francisco, he adamantly rejects the notion that he is a homeless person. In his mind, he is a misunderstood, highly principled artist.** Robert L. Terrell photo

Bay Area Protesters Defend the Rights of Immigrants

by David Bacon

In San Francisco and Oakland, immigrants and community activists protested Arizona's SB 1070, which would require police and local law enforcement to check the immigration status of people they suspect might be undocumented. The protest took place on July 29, the day the law took effect.

A day earlier, Federal Judge Susan Bolton invalidated much of the law, but demonstrations against the law involving thousands of people took place around the country nevertheless.

In San Francisco, demonstrators also protested cooperation between police and immigration agents in arresting people for deportation, in front of the office of California Attorney General Jerry Brown.

Brown, a candidate for governor, ruled that San Francisco could not opt out of the Secure Communities program, which mandates such cooperation and would invalidate San Francisco's sanctuary city ordinance. Protesters went into Brown's office and told one of his assistants about their objections.

Renee Saucedo, an attorney with La Raza Centro Legal and a leader of the protestors, said: "It's no coincidence that Arizona has this outrageous law, because all the proposals from Washington on immigration reform encourage the same criminalization, racial profiling and discrimination. Immigrant communities are demanding an end to these policies and laws, including 'Secure Communities' and 'E-Verify.' We deserve a new direction from Washington, with real change, including legalization and workers' rights."

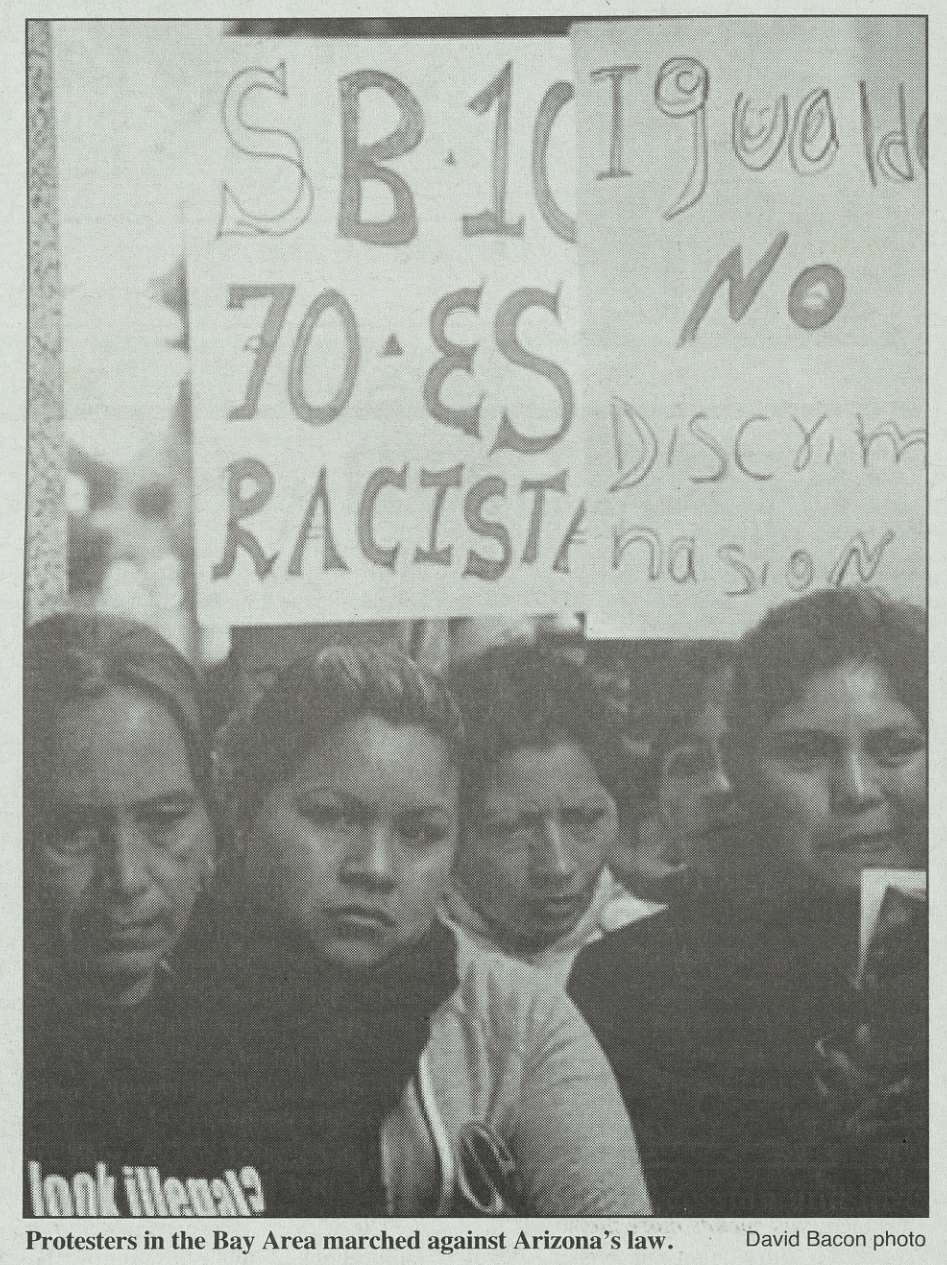
In many other parts of the country, demonstrations connected the Arizona law to local anti-immigrant measures, and to an increase in enforcement actions by the federal government.

In Mississippi, the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance held a protest inside the state capitol in Jackson, in front of a statue of former Senator Theodore Bilbo. In the era in which African-Americans were beaten and even lynched for demanding voting and civil rights, Bilbo was a leader of the Dixiecrats in Congress. He was notorious for attacking African Americans, Jews, immigrants, Catholics and all progressive people.

A church choir sang "Listen Mr. Bilbo," written by Bob and Adrienne Claiborne in 1946 and popularized by Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers. The song begins with the verse:

Listen, Mr. Bilbo, listen to me
I'll give you a lesson in history.
Listen and I'll show you that the foreigners you hate
Are the very same people made America great.

Bill Chandler, director of the Alliance, asked: "Is not trying to bring this xenophobic and racist Arizona law into Mississippi playing the Bilbo Card? Is it not their stated intent to intimidate and drive immigrants out of our state, just as their ancestors' intent was to intimidate, terrorize, and drive out African Americans in the last century? And to enforce inequality on those left behind?"



Protesters in the Bay Area marched against Arizona's law. David Bacon photo

'This Law Is Very Unjust!'

by Teresa Mina, as told to David Bacon

Teresa Mina was a San Francisco janitor, member of Service Employees Union Local 87, when she was fired because the company said she didn't have legal immigration documents. Immigration and Customs Enforcement told her employer to fire 463 workers because they lacked legal immigration status. She told her story to David Bacon the day before she returned to Mexico.

I come from Tierra Blanca, a very poor town in Veracruz. After my children's father abandoned us, I decided to come to the U.S. There's just no money to survive. We couldn't continue to live that way.

We all felt horrible when I decided to leave. My three kids, my mom, and two sisters are still living at home in Veracruz. The only one supporting them now is me.

My kids' suffering isn't so much about money. I've been able to send enough to pay the bills. What they lack is love. They don't have a father; they just have me. My mother cares for them, but it's not the same.

They always ask me to come back. They say maybe we'll be poor, but we'll be together. I haven't been able to go back to see them for six years, because I don't have any papers to come back to the U.S. afterwards. To cross now is very hard and expensive.

My first two years in San Francisco I cleaned houses. The work was hard, and I was lonely. It's different here. Because I'm Latina and I don't know English, if I go into a store, they watch me from head to foot, like I'm a robber.

After two years, I got a job as a janitor, making $17.85 per hour. Cleaning houses only paid $10. But then I was molested sexually. Another worker exposed himself to me and my friend. When we went to the company and filed a complaint, they took me off the job and kept me out of work a month. They didn't pay me all that time.

That's when my problems started, because I called the union and asked them to help me. After that, the company called me a problematic person, because I wouldn't be quiet and I fought for my rights. Sometimes they wouldn't give me any work.

When you work as a janitor you're mostly alone. You pick up trash, clean up the kitchen and vacuum. These are simple things, and they tire you out, but basically it's a good job. Lots of times we don't take any breaks, though. To finish everything, sometimes we don't even stop for lunch.

No one ever said anything to me about immigration for four years. But then the company gave a letter to my coworkers, saying they wouldn't be able to continue working because they had no papers. About 40 people got them at first. Eventually I got a letter too.

The person from human relations said immigration had demanded the papers for all the people working at the company. She said 300 people didn't have good papers. People whose papers were bad had a month to give the company other documents. If the immigration authorities said these were no good too, we'd be fired. She said the immigration might come looking for us where we lived.

We had a meeting at the union about the letters. Some people in that meeting had papers, and came to support those of us who didn't. They said when they first came here they had to cross the border like we did, in order to find work.

They complained that so many of us were being fired that the workload increased for people who were left. The union got weaker too. We're all paying $49 a month in union dues, and that adds up to a lot. We're paying that money so that the union will defend us if we get fired like this. In that meeting we said we wanted equal rights. No one should be fired unless the immigration arrests us. We don't want the company to enforce immigration law. The company isn't the law.



Teresa Mina was fired in a crackdown on immigrant workers. David Bacon photo

The company gave me no work in December and January. I was desperate. I had no money. I had to move in with someone else, because I couldn't pay rent. I couldn't send money home to my children.

I was so stressed, I fell and broke my arm, and was out on disability. Then I went back to work, and when I went to get my check, the woman in the office wouldn't pay me until I showed them new immigration papers. She gave me three days to bring then, and said if I didn't I'd be fired. I asked her, "so you're the immigration?"

I felt really bad. I spent so many years killing myself in that job, and I needed to keep it so I could send money home. But I couldn't keep fighting. I didn't want my problems to get even bigger — I could tell things would only get worse.

I went back after three days, and told the company I didn't have any good papers. I asked for my pay for the hours I'd worked, and my vacation. I told them I had a flight back to Mexico and needed my check. They only paid me 60 hours, though they owed me 82. They knew I was leaving and couldn't fight them over it.

This law is very unjust. We're doing jobs that are heavy and dirty. We work day and night to help our children have a better life, or just to eat. My work is the only support for my family. Now my children won't have what they need.

Many people are frightened now. They don't want to complain or fight about anything because they're afraid they might get fired. They think if we keep fighting, the immigration will pick us up. They have families here. What will happen to their children? Nobody knows. They worry that what's happened to me might happen to them.

I can't afford to live here for months without working. I came to this country to work for my children. But if this is what happens because I've been fighting and struggling, I'd rather leave, and go home and live with my children. In the end, they need me more.

So I guess I'll go back to Tierra Blanca. I'll work in the fields or try selling food there. My family says the economic situation at home is very hard. I'm not bringing much money home. But I like to work, and I know I'll find a way.

The Message of Arnieville Lives On

The homeless people "really stood in solidarity with the disabled in this class action and took care of them — helped them get in their beds, helped them turn over at night, carried them in and out of their tents, stayed up all night with security." — Dan McMullin



A banner at the entrance to the Arnieville encampment quotes the prophetic warning of Martin Luther King: *A nation that spends more money on the military than on programs of social uplift approaches spiritual death.* Lydia Gans photo

by Lydia Gans

They called it Arnieville, a Berkeley encampment of concerned people who joined together to call attention to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's threat of devastating cuts to services for seniors and people with disabilities.

The name was a takeoff on the Hoovervilles of the 1930s, when homeless people lived in tents and shacks, both for shelter and to protest then-President Hoover's Depression-era policies. Now, some 80 years after the first Hoovervilles were built, Berkeley activists carried out one of the longest-lasting disability rights protests ever, and christened it Arnieville, in response to Arnold Schwarzenegger's crippling budget cuts.

For a month, disabled people, seniors, home care workers and innumerable friends and supporters camped out on the median strip on Adeline Street in Berkeley. It started on June 22, the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision on the Olmstead Act which declared that under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people with disabilities cannot be forced to live in institutions if they can live in the community. Furthermore, services must be provided for them.

Dan McMullin, one of the original organizers, recalled, "There was a lot of fear, of terror about the budget cuts." Earlier, there had been protests in Sacramento and people with disabilities wanted to participate, but just getting there presented problems.

"The train has two spots for wheelchairs in each car," McMullin pointed out. "So in a train of eight cars, only 16 people can go." Yet, many more disabled people wanted to take part in the actions. The alternative was to do something locally. There was a one-week camp-out in May and, he said, "Next month we came back and it was overwhelming."

That month-long camp-out, from June 22 to July 22, ultimately consisted of more than a dozen tents, and drew tremendous community support. City officials and police were friendly, and individuals and organizations brought supplies and food. There wasn't a day that there wasn't a hot meal, coffee and baked goods brought for the encampment.

There was also music, poetry, art, a film series and all sorts of community activities and workshops, as well as daily strategy meetings. Among the campers themselves were people with disabilities who are threatened with having to be confined in institutions if Schwarzennegger's cuts are implemented. Also present were home care workers who would lose their jobs or have their hours reduced, causing them to lose their medical benefits. And there were homeless people too, who were a key part of the community.

McMullin talked about the "homeless connection" to the disability rights movement. "I would say a good 80 to 85 percent of the people that are homeless are disabled, so they are the same community," McMullin said. "A lot of people want to separate the communities because it looks bad for people that are in power to let disabled people rot on the streets, but that's what's going on."

He added, "The homeless people are not only part of that community already, but the more able of them really stood in solidarity with the disabled in this class action and took care of them — helped them get in their beds, helped them turn over at night, carried them in and out of their tents, stayed up all night with security."

McMullin went on to declare: "I can't turn my back on something like that." He is in the process of organizing a program to get more permanent assistance for the homeless community.

At present, the Arnieville camp has closed down, but the pressure on Sacramento will continue. Urged by the campers, the Berkeley City Council sent a strongly worded letter to the governor stating opposition to the cuts and to the increasing harassment of home care workers and recipients.

The protesters are now working to get city councils throughout the state to do the same. Jean Stewart, another of the organizers, described this tent city as a "role model" and hoped "that other communities around the state who are being impacted by these cuts will replicate what we're doing — set up their own tent cities. We want tent cities to spring up on every median strip in California!"

View from the Pavement

by George Wynn

Seven days a week
a senior lays out
on a Market Street
corner under a
sign post
in a winter coat
no matter hot or cold.

Food and money
and clothes bold
people give him
to survive
while checking
up on him
to see if
he's still alive.

I Walked by Jesus

by John Perry

I walked by Jesus
last night.
He was wearing
a grimy T-shirt
grease-stained chinos
and a worn out
pair of sneakers
with a broken lace.

He stood alone
On Fourth Street
where it crosses Mission.
And looked at me
with longing eyes.
His dirty arms
extended toward me
in a sient plea.

Suffering there;
for sins
not his own,
for rejection
He did not deserve,
an outcast
even from his own people.

Standing there
day after day
with outstretched hands;
He offers each passer-by
purpose,
love,
and hope.

As I drop a couple bucks
into his cup,
I wonder
how many of us
just pass on by.

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August 2010

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Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency).**

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Federal Government's Complicity in Dismantling the Nation's Affordable Housing and Shredding the Safety Net

by Paul Boden and Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP)

It's hard to cut through the never-ending news cycles that bombard us daily to deliver a message. If your organization lacks resources and political clout, it becomes even harder. If the message has anything to do with human rights and homelessness, forget about it.

In a time when many in the United States find themselves on the brink of economic collapse, individuals and families are looking out over a horizon dotted with issues that affect their every way of life, but feel absolutely powerless to do anything about it.

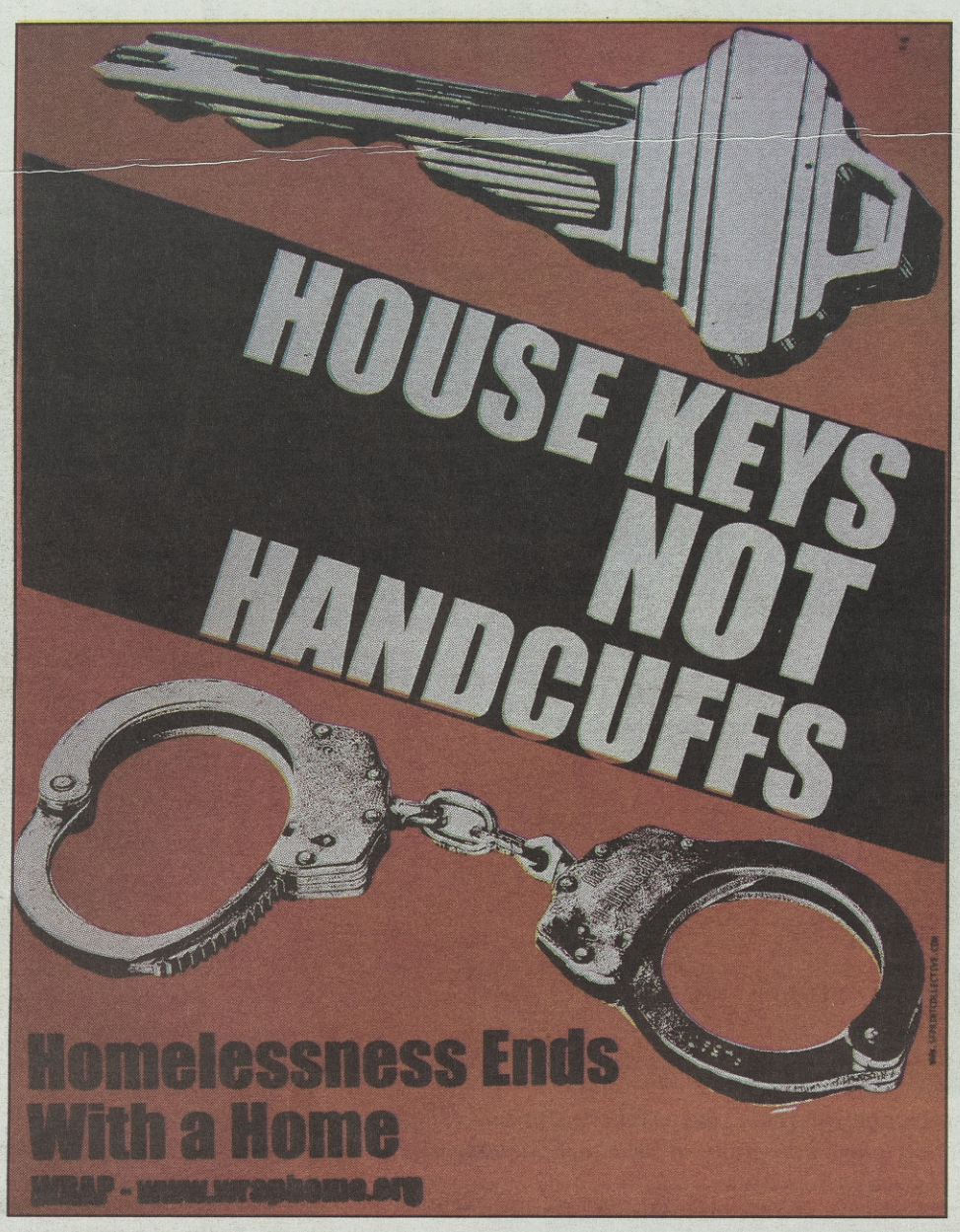
The media in all its forms delivers headlines by the second about natural disasters, the global economy and soldiers who die fighting for a war we barely understand. Meanwhile, in households from Peoria to Portland, the realities of daily life set in — loss of jobs, massive foreclosures, and the loss of unemployment benefits. Ultimately, for hundreds of thousands of us, the loss of any safety net whatsoever. Homelessness.

In 1979, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development spent $77.3 billion in today's money developing and maintaining housing to ensure all people could afford a place to live. Yet, since 1995, the federal government has done nothing while more than 500,000 of these housing units have been lost; another 335,000 could disappear this year. To put this into perspective, the Federal Budget's discretionary military spending is at $663.8 billion.

In 2009, roughly 3.4 million families experienced foreclosures — 60 percent caused by unemployment. This year, as many as 3.5 million people will experience homelessness in the United States — a number that has been increasing since the Wall Street collapse, and the government bailout of the banks. This increase in homelessness and foreclosures occurred in the midst of the Bush administration's 10-year plan to end "chronic" homelessness.

The Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), a group of grassroots homeless organizations based in California and Oregon, is releasing an in-depth, updated version of *Without Housing: Decades of Federal Housing Cutbacks, Massive Homelessness and Policy Failures*.

The popular report was first released in 2006, and has become a staple for politicians, scholars, think-tanks, poverty organizations and the general public to track the rise of modern-day homelessness. From the Reagan era in the 1980s, when the federal government dismantled the social safety net, to the present day, the report outlines the past three decades of policy failures that have led us to this point.



Local municipalities have created laws that dehumanize and criminalize the homeless masses who simply have no place left to go. County jails have become this country's largest residential mental health facilities.

The new report outlines an abridged history of homelessness dating back to the 1929 stock market crash, when more than one million people found themselves without homes, and details the United States' effective response to the crisis through creating both urban and rural housing programs to systemically all but end that era's homelessness.

The updated report is not only a roadmap into the past, but is also a fresh look at present-day realities of homelessness in the United States. By highlighting both the local and federal responses to homelessness, we see how people experiencing homelessness and mental health have been systematically stripped of their human rights. The report also provides a roadmap for the future, and how we can effectively fight poverty by systemically changing how the system is structured.

Currently, local and state governments who are strapped, and in many cases on the verge of financial collapse due to the recession, are throwing millions of local dollars at the problem of homelessness and housing.

For three decades, cities and towns across the country have been on the hook for the federal government's dismantling of our housing safety net. Yet both Democrats and Republicans at the federal level continue to fail to deliver the necessary resources for local communities to stabilize the situation.

Local municipalities have created laws that dehumanize and criminalize the local masses who simply have no place left to go. County jails have become this country's largest residential mental health facilities. Policing poor people has replaced treatment, and courts are being staffed with social workers, while business-created "improvement" districts spend as much as 74 percent of their budgets on private security and have become proficient in the business of drafting anti-homeless laws.

Shelters have become an institutionalized tier of our country's housing stock and social workers are expected to fix "broken" people, rather than address social inequality and the lack of access to treatment. Homelessness has become institutionalized.

In *Without Housing*, WRAP looks at these different quagmires, and offers a grassroots approach to getting involved, and possible solutions to what has become the everyday crisis we know as homelessness. We are re-igniting a social justice movement, and organizing for change. Millions of hard-working people without shelter are depending on it. We deserve the opportunity.

You can download a copy of the report at www.wraphome.org.

Sleeping Cart Hobos

by George Wynn

I see them sitting
in the rain
on a Golden Gate
park bench
with other old men
shoes and socks
by their side
stretching their
callused toes.
Not a single
grimace from
the pain.
These are the
tough ones.
They have not
lost their way
despite what
society may say.

Peace of Mind

by George Wynn

When he gets there
he knows he will
feel just right
Poncho clad
trekking along
El Camino Real.

He finds the cemeteries
up on the hill
give him the will to continue
They are as peaceful as
the sight of his mother
praying to the Virgin Mary
No shelter honcho
scolding: "Thou shalt
not do this and that
and that," making
his nerves ever so brittle.

Lush green grass
takes time to grow
Somehow little by
little he will rebuild
his life.

Spills Humans

by Sue Ellen Pector

Severed from its foundation
gripped by a monster,
the tenement house spills humans.
Slivered moon observes.
War mongering capitalism,
your deadly might dwarfs
tall buildings.

Inspired by "The Hand That Takes" by Eric Drooker from July 2010 *Street Spirit*

Ageless Will

by George Wynn

Up on Cathedral Hill
survivors in tattered clothes
— some given up for dead —
pray and feast on
tuna fish sandwiches
cornbread and coffee
and move on
with ageless will
under a black cloud.

Out of the Fog

by George Wynn

He never heard
her say good-bye
she just went abroad
what suffering
what pain
It was a freezing
San Francisco morning
on top of the
unbearable memory

He pats his dog and reflects:
he tried the bottle
and God Almighty
but still felt lost

In her eyes
he felt fulfilled
So now in a
silent Nob Hill alley
he draws portraits of her
She comes again
in the fog
and the sun
comes out.

A Street Spirit Vendor

by Maureen Hartmann

A young man was sitting on Sunday
with neat piles
of the March and April issues
near Harrison and Grand where
the Cathedral of Christ the Light
is located.
He was dressed in neat casual clothing.
I told him to save the newspapers
for other customers.
I promised him a dollar,
but could only find change for
85 cents in my purse.
He put out his cupped hand and
accepted it gratefully like a gentleman.

LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

I have never seen him visited by a relative or friend. Although he is surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people, his is an extremely lonely existence.

from page 1



An elderly man and his dog *(at left)* live together in a van in the writer's neighborhood in San Francisco. Robert L. Terrell photo



The homeless artist proudly displays his paintings at a streetside art gallery he created himself. Robert L. Terrell photo

in this nation regarding the deepening plight of people like the old man who lives with his dog in a van on the south end of my block.

Some segments of the national economy are recovering quite nicely from the recent Great Recession. Multimillion-dollar Wall Street bonuses are flowing again. The stock market is on an upswing, and the national economy is growing, albeit slowly.

Nonetheless, tens of millions of desperate people remain unemployed, millions of others have lost their homes, and numerous, grotesque forms of poverty are rampant throughout the nation.

In past eras when economic times were bad, those enduring the most desperate circumstances often took to the roads in search of better options in other places. Sometimes following rumors, and at others flowing in whatever direction they could go via a free ride, they attempted to escape from deprivation and economic despair in whatever ways they could.

Much of the drama, agony and heroism inherent in the most neglected portions of our nation's contested history is composed of personal sagas associated with such treks. The wagon trains, the trails of tears, the runaway slaves, the leaving stories involving small towns and farms, the Dust Bowl refugees, the pioneers, the mail order brides, the gun-for-hire guys, and all the approximate, woebegone sagas so very frequently associated with them, are all tied together in one way or another by economic desperation.

Those who were brave, strong and resilient always had better options during such times than those who were very young or very old, weak and indecisive.

On more occasions than most U.S. citizens are willing to acknowledge or contemplate, economic desperation has pushed some of our ablest to seek better options on the high seas, and in other nations. Sometimes those who pursued this option returned after a sojourn abroad, and sometimes they didn't. Sometimes they left as civilians, but they also left frequently as missionaries, businessmen and soldiers of every imaginable sort.

If you have traveled extensively, you have seen the profoundly lonely graveyards and markers commemorating those who died under circumstances where their identities and nationalities were known. Sometimes the graveyards and markers are kept in meticulously good order, and sometimes they share the pervasive neglect and decline dominant in the environments in which they exist.

Part of the point being made here is that in the not-so-distant past, the world's economic activities were far less unified than today. That meant that options were always available somewhere in the world where economic circumstances were superior to those here in the United States.

The globalized economic system in which this nation is completely enmeshed today has essentially eliminated the option of going somewhere else in search of better economic options for most citizens.

Foreign economic opportunity still exists to some extent for the wealthy, and members of the professional classes. But escaping to another nation that will offer substantially superior economic security is a slim-to-nonexistent option for average, working-class Americans. And this is particularly the case for those situated below them on the bottom rungs of the national socio-economic order.

Moreover, given the fact that the national economy is even more unified than the global one, we are probably faced with a situation wherein the number of good options for people to move from one section of the nation to another to secure better economic options is almost certainly rapidly decreasing.

Those who do take to the roads these days in search of better economic options quickly find that cities in every section of the nation are experiencing dire financial straits. Given this situation, it should not surprise that communities typically distribute their scarce and dwindling resources devoted to helping those in need in ways that favor long-term, local residents.

Strangers, drifters and folks perceived to be foreign can obtain certain forms of minimal assistance in communities they encounter along the road. But mostly, they are encouraged to keep moving.

I don't mean to imply that people are not generous, supportive and giving. Many of them are, and our national tragedy would be far worse if this were not the case. Volunteers, the vast majority of whom are anonymous and rarely acknowledged, are the foundation of the fragile web of support that keeps many millions of our countrymen and women alive.

But volunteers are also the people most closely associated with the term "compassion fatigue." Far too many of them are clearly overburdened by the enormity of the task of trying to provide, as best they can, for an expanding multitude composed of tens of millions of poor people in desperate need of assistance.

In any event, the nature of the current economic crisis here in the United States is such that many people are stuck in place. But this is not necessarily the case for people from less wealthy nations, who are also experiencing economic desperation due to globalization, and a host of other related economic problems.

For such people, making the big move, however dangerous, is worth the risk. Here in the United States, such economic refugees, many of whom have been displaced by U.S. governmental and corporate policies, are commonly referred to as "illegal immigrants."

Even though the vast majority of those who fall into this highly disparaged category are "your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" — the very same "homeless tempest-tossed" people formerly welcomed into America by Emma Lazarus' inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty — such people are no longer welcome here.

Moreover, hostility is one of the dominant characteristics of the emergent sensibility in many sectors of the nation regarding poor emigrants who come here in search of better lives.

Anyone who doubts the validity of this allegation need only note the widespread support across the nation for the highly controversial anti-immigration laws currently being implemented in the state of Arizona. The net result is that economic pressure of a virtually unimaginable sort is being exerted on those at the bottom, and tens of millions of people are being forced to live barren, brutish lives sequestered at the margins of society.

The elderly man who lives in the van with his dog at the south end of my block is such a person, and his story is complicated and troubling. Mostly, it reminds us that homelessness is an extremely complicated phenomenon that will not be eliminated

See **Life in the Slow Lane** *page 7*

Living on the Fringe of Capitalism

by Buford Buntin

The short, muscular man says,

"I been tryin' to get a place
for us, but my sweetie says
it don't matter. She's comin'
out here from Ft. Lauderdale."

He stands talking to friends
from his place two spots
in front of me in the Glide line.

"She's gonna bring her
sleeping bag to lie beside me,
in the park, maybe.
Where I been sleeping,
the gate's locked &
nobody can get in,
& if I want to get out,
I can climb the fence."

We continue on,
as he and his handsome
orange San Francisco
Giants jersey
gleam a little even
on this cool foggy day.

His face, filled with joy,
turns toward the front
of the line.

PETRA Spells the End of Public Housing

The right-wing privatization scheme threatens to displace hundreds of thousands of low-income families, elderly and the disabled from their public housing units.

from page 1

dized with federal funding taken from the poor, in the Section 8 program.

In opposition, public housing and Section 8 tenants appeared at several Berkeley City Council meetings and other public meetings to speak out against alleged illegal activities of the BHA, and to protest the scheme to privatize and sell 75 public housing units to an unnamed nonprofit housing developer.

Also, on Jan. 19, 2010, public housing tenants held protest signs in front of Berkeley's Old City Hall during the harsh rainstorms pounding the Bay Area, before stepping inside the City Council meeting to demand the resignation of BHA Director Tia Ingram and BHA Chair Carole Norris, for their involvement in the attempt to privatize and sell Berkeley's public housing units.

Nearly seven months later, BHA Director Tia Ingram and BHA Commissioner Chair Carole Norris still remain in power, HUD has not yet approved the BHA's disposition plan, and many of Berkeley's public housing residents feel stress and anxiety from constantly facing displacement from their housing.

Meanwhile, the BHA hired Overland, Pacific and Cutler (OPC) to relocate Berkeley's public housing residents if the disposition plan is approved. On July 16, OPC consultant Chad Wakefield started working on some notices to send out to Berkeley's public housing residents to let them know he wants to have two meetings with the residents sometime in August. Wakefield wants to ask Berkeley's public housing residents what they want to do regarding their housing situation if the disposition plan is approved by HUD, even though many have already spoken out publicly against the scheme to sell off Berkeley's public housing, and Wakefield is already well aware of this.

BHA's Efforts to Deceive Public Housing Residents

In a bizarre effort to hoodwink public housing residents into believing that their housing units are not really being privatized once the units are transferred to a new owner in the private housing sector, BHA Director Tia Ingram sent a letter on June 17 to public housing resident Keith Carlisle and Berkeley's public housing resident organization, Residents Awareness in Action (RAIA). Ingram congratulated Carlisle for reactivating RAIA, and formally acknowledged the group's opposition to the scheme to privatize and dispose of Berkeley's public housing, which she refers to as the "repositioning" project.

BHA's Ingram writes, "I use the term repositioning as it more accurately reflects what we are attempting to do, and that is transfer assisted families from Public Housing to Section 8, not 'removing' or even worse 'disposing' of units. It is my hope that with time, and careful, thoughtful and consistent effort, we will be able to provide RAIA, and every current resident, sufficient information about how and why we arrived at the decision to pursue repositioning, and equally important, how repositioning can result in a win-win situation for current and future residents and the Berkeley Housing Authority."

Berkeley public housing residents are not fooled by the campaign of lies and deceit, knowing very well that Section 8 is the subsidized program for tenants in the privatized housing market, and that it should not be confused with the public housing program, no matter what Ingram wants them to believe.

Documents clearly reveal that it was Ingram who signed the disposition plan filed with HUD to dispose of and remove Berkeley's public housing from the inventory of public housing units, with the intent to sell the units to so-called nonprofit housing developers.

Affordable Housing Swindle

In 1937, the U.S. Housing Act created the first public housing program, authorizing local housing authorities across the nation to build public housing that is financed through long-term bonds to serve low-income families.

Since the creation of public housing, there are an additional 13 other federally subsidized housing programs to assist the poor, including the Section 8 Tenant-Based voucher program, and the Section 8 Project-Based voucher program for tenants being subsidized in the private housing marketplace.

So-called privatized affordable housing developments should not be confused with public housing, despite the fact that the backers of a scheme to privatize our nation's 1.2 million public housing units are doing their best to hoodwink the public into believing that public housing, and so-called affordable housing developments, are one and the same.

Public housing provides housing to low-income families, the elderly, blind, disabled and households with no income at all, while so-called affordable housing developers have minimum income requirements that discriminate against the poor.

Affordable housing developers often charge above-market-rate rents in their buildings and want the public to believe that that they offer housing to the poor. But often, these developers refuse to rent to the poor unless the poor are subsidized through the Section 8 program, or some other federal housing program.

The so-called affordable housing industry stands to make billions of dollars if Congress approves PETRA, a scheme to accelerate the privatization of public housing all across the nation.

If the backers of this right-wing scheme to privatize public housing have their way, and the Obama administration's PETRA proposal is approved by Congress, public housing programs across the nation may be terminated and 1.2 million public housing units may be privatized in the near future, and placed at risk of foreclosures.

The Obama administration is promoting PETRA to change the way our nation's 2,400 public housing authorities operate in an effort to privatize public housing. This has set off a feud between 2.3 million public housing residents who are in opposition to the privatization of their housing, and the proponents of public housing privatization from the so-called affordable housing industry, who stand to make billions if they can get their hands on 1.2 million public housing units.

The problem with public housing is that Congress has underfunded it through the years, creating a huge backlog of repairs and maintenance. All Congress needs to do is provide more funding to remedy the situation.

Instead of asking for more funding from Congress, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan and the Obama administration want to privatize the 1.2 million public housing units in a complicated scheme to transfer ownership to affordable housing developers that will charge above-market-rate rents subsidized by the Section 8 program, in the belief that the new owners would then be able to tap into the equity of the properties to get loans from the private sector for the backlog of maintenance and repairs.

The privatization scheme threatens to displace hundreds of thousands of low-income families, elderly and the disabled from their public housing units, and future funding shortfalls in the Section 8 program would place the housing units at risk of bank foreclosure.

In addition, if PETRA is approved by Congress, the nation's 13 federally subsidized housing programs will be converted into one huge new hybrid program, with only one funding stream for the whole program. Currently, each of the 13 subsidized housing programs have their own budget and funding streams, to make certain the funding reaches its intended target. Once the funding streams are converted into one huge slush fund, no one will be able to tell how much funding for the poor, elderly or the disabled has been diverted to finance the public housing privatization scheme, PETRA.

PETRA has been denounced and rejected by thousands across the nation, including Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Congressman Barney Frank, but HUD and the Obama administration are moving forward as though they already have Congressional approval for PETRA — as is evidenced in the recent HUD budget submitted for 2011.

HUD wants to reduce public housing funding by about $500 million in 2011, in addition to reducing funding for the elderly in the Section 202 housing program from $825 million to $274 million, and reducing funding for persons with disabilities in the Section 211 housing program from $300 million to only $90 million.

The Obama administration also wants to reduce the family reunification voucher program from $15 million in funding to zero, and wants to reduce the veteran's supportive housing voucher program from $75 million to zero, for 2011.

HUD and the Obama administration are clearly trying to grab as much funding as possible from federally subsidized housing programs for veterans, low-income families, the blind, elderly and disabled, in order to finance the PETRA scheme to privatize 1.2 million public housing units, in an effort to enrich the affordable housing sector by billions of dollars with funding taken from the poor.

Activists are urging the public to contact their representatives to say no to PETRA.

Lynda Carson may be reached at tenantsrule@yahoo.com

Discarded

by Sue Ellen Pector

Spiraling line of
tall men, huddled in
coats, await bread.
Light and shadow
prisms of powerlessness.
Discarded men
lost hungry afraid,
no one hears
your swallowed rage.

Inspired by "Breadline 1935" by Iver Rose from the July 2010 *Street Spirit*

A Toast to the Union

by Carol Denney

give me the working-class heroes who never think twice about lending a hand
give me the bars and bordellos and ladies who know the real worth of a man
give me the drunks and the junkies who know the true depth and the soul of desire
give me the rail-riding bums and the hoboes who sing to the stars by the fire
give me the losers and down-and-out underdogs buying each other a beer
give me the bankrupted nobodies giving salutes of good luck and good cheer
here's to the truckers who fly across mountains on love songs and rubber and prayer
here's to the workers who sing at the top of their lungs as if no one was there

***Chorus:* we belong, we belong, and the union between us is strong**
we may be wrong here but yes we belong here this is our life and our land
no one can take it away if we make our shared paradise and we can

here's to the felons, parolees and miscreants hollering Saturday night
here's to the fry cooks in truckstops with breakfast at dawn making everything right
here's to the misfit, the unhip who cannot put up with the sickening show
here's to the kid who knows just what he did and when asked why just says
I don't know
chase down the worst and I'll tell you they're first on the list of the people I love
show me the women who'll slam their opinion down hard with no pearls and no glove
saddle me up with the liars and showmen whose stories go on until dawn
put me right next to the gamblers who bested the best and don't care what they won

***Chorus:* we belong, we belong, and the union between us is strong**
we may be wrong here but yes we belong here this is our life and our land
no one can take it away if we make our shared paradise and we can

here's to the bartenders, waiters and waitresses hustling for nickels and dimes
here's to the clear-headed hard-hearted heartbreakers pouring out songs with the wine
here's to the suckers and slackers who bought the whole package and didn't know why
here's to the bums and the beggars who fail and keep railing at life till they die
here's to fumblers, the blundering stumblers who never get picked for the game
here's to the aimless, the nameless who shamelessly spit upon fortune and fame
here's to the takers and fakers who shook up the dice and looked twice and then ran
here's to the jagged old raggedy farts kicking dreams down the road like a can

***Chorus:* we belong, we belong, and the union between us is strong**
we may be wrong here but yes we belong here this is our life and our land
no one can take it away if we make our shared paradise and we can

tell me the lies and the stories that tear my heart open as though they were mine
paint me the dreams and the paintings and make it so real I'm left speechless and blind
tear up the maps and the borders admit it we're all here together today
we're all unrepentant and this is our sentence and damn it get out of our way

***Chorus:* we belong, we belong, and the union between us is strong**
we may be wrong here but yes we belong here this is our life and our land
no one can take it away if we make our shared paradise and we can

No Place at the Table

Across the nation, cities restrict charitable meal programs for the hungry and homeless

WASHINGTON, DC — The National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty released a report in July 2010 that focuses on cities that have created laws, policies and tactics to limit groups from sharing food with homeless people..

The report, entitled *A Place at the Table: Prohibitions on Sharing Food with People Experiencing Homelessness,* also highlights positive alternatives to penalizing food-sharing activities by charities, nonprofit agencies and volunteers.

Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the Law Center, said, "As the recession and foreclosure crises drive dramatic increases in poverty and homelessness, communities should be embracing solutions to homelessness, rather than punishing people for feeding those in need. Restricting food sharing is not a constructive approach."

The report argues that targeting churches, service providers and volunteers by placing restrictions on providing food to homeless people is part of a broader trend toward criminalizing homelessness. Criminalization measures include city laws that outlaw activities homeless people are forced to do in public spaces because of their lack of a home or shelter, such as sitting on sidewalks and eating and sleeping in public.

These laws have been created in communities nationwide and are an ineffective response to homelessness. The report outlines how different types of laws and tactics are being used to restrict food sharing.

"The criminalization or restriction of specific activities that seek to serve people experiencing homelessness should cause any community to sound an alarm that their ability to meet the needs of those who are least among them is compromised and needs fixing," said Neil Donovan, executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless.

National advocacy groups argue that access to food is both a human need and right. When cities prohibit the charitable act of sharing food with homeless people, the city is hindering crucial access to food for the homeless population. City leaders must instead look towards alternatives, including working with food-sharing groups, promoting innovative programs in their communities and utilizing federal nutrition programs.

The report highlights food sharing restrictions in 23 communities across the country, including: Atlanta, Ga.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colo.; Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Fort Myers, Fla.; Gainesville, Fla.; Huntington, N.Y.; Las Vegas, Nev.; Little Rock, Ark.; Miami, Fla.; Middletown, Conn.; Myrtle Beach, S.C.; Nashville, Tenn.; Orlando, Fla.; Phoenix, Ariz.; Portland, Or.; San Diego, Cal.; San Juan, P.R.; Sarasota, Fla.; Sultan, Wash.; West Palm Beach, Fla.; and Wilmington, N.C.

The full report is available online at www.nationalhomeless.org and www.nlchp.org.



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

"As the recession and foreclosure crises drive dramatic increases in poverty and homelessness, communities should be embracing solutions to homelessness, rather than punishing people for feeding those in need." — **Maria Foscarinis**

Life in the Slow Lane

from page 5

without the implementation of programs that mirror many of the objectives provided by the New Deal legislation enacted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The old man who lives in the van with his dog was born into a prosperous family in the Philippines about 70 years ago (he declines to give his exact age). I am reluctant to provide his name here in order to protect him from official responses that might result in his immediate eviction from his streetside vehicular residence.

He spends much of his time sitting in a folding chair on the sidewalk next to the van. On nice days, he affixes his framed paintings to the brick wall of the adjacent building. Possibly because of the sometimes-threatening dog, few passers-by stop to examine the paintings.

Nonetheless, he is an accepted member of the neighborhood. He greets us with a slow wave of his hand when we leave home in the mornings on our way to work, and does the same when we return in the evening. He is apparently unaware that some residents of the block have taken to calling him the neighborhood "Mayor."

He attended college in the Philippines, where he earned a degree in electrical engineering. Armed with his new degree, he migrated to Canada, where he was employed for a decade by one of Canada's largest corporations

That period of his life was prosperous, and he enjoyed professional, economic and social success. With the passage of time, he migrated in search of more interesting work and better opportunities. He worked in the Bahamas, then Alaska, and finally moved to the United States.

Bored with electrical engineering, he obtained positions in other fields, including city planning, banking and real estate. During that particular phase of his life, he generally earned high salaries, wore expensive clothing and hung out at fashionable golf courses, where he regularly indulged his passion for the game.

But something was amiss. His inability to settle on a profession is an indication that he was somehow or another ill-suited to a life of prosperity and comfort in the professional mainstream. His commentary on the subject is vague, and somewhat evasive. But he does acknowledge that part of his problem had to do with ethics and morality. In other words, he proved emotionally incapable of taking the routine ethical and moral shortcuts required of those who are considered reliable "team players" in the frequently cruel and heartless culture of big business.

The net result is that he was slowly, but inexorably, excluded from that culture. One of the most important low points in his life took place about ten years ago when he was forced to work in an Alaskan fish-gutting factory in order to earn enough money to survive.

After his stint as a fish gutter, he moved to Seattle and decided that he was an artist. Seattle didn't embrace his art, so he tried to sell his computer-generated paintings in Los Angles. But his art attracted less interest in Los Angeles than it did in Seattle.

In response, he packed his meager belongings in his van and headed for the Bay Area. He spent his first seven years in San Francisco hawking paintings on sidewalks outside elite restaurants located near the city's commercial center. He sold enough paintings to keep going, but not enough to accumulate funds sufficient to acquire an apartment or rented room.

Each afternoon, he joins the crowd of up-and-coming tech workers who flood the block in search of food and expensive, organic coffee.

Sporting a graying ponytail, and attired in rumpled clothing and well-worn sandals, he does his best to blend in, and possibly sell a painting or two to the well-paid young workers who flow up and down the block discussing all manner of high-tech problems and fantasies.

Virtually none of them purchase his paintings.

One of the things that impressed me during the long interview I recently conducted with him was his proud, adamant rejection of the notion that he is a homeless person. In his mind, he is a misunderstood, underappreciated, highly principled artist.

To him, the fact that he lives in an old, rundown van with a large, grumpy, hunting dog is irrelevant. He has few regrets about things he has lost on his journey through life: two wives, a child, successful careers, nice houses, expensive automobiles, substantial savings and one of his dogs.

At this point, everything he owns is inside the van, including scores of painted canvases, business papers and old golf clubs. He has a website, and he conducts his business affairs, such as they are, from a comfortable table situated near the wall in the rear of a Starbucks coffee shop.

His hope is that a patron will come forward and provide financial support sufficient for him to acquire an apartment and a studio where he can regularly paint. He adamantly vows that he will not accept support from any patron who will not commit to providing him at least $30,000 per year in financial support.

He is convinced that within six to eight months after he acquires support from a patron, he will produce 10 to 15 large canvases, which he intends to exhibit in an upscale gallery, and subsequently sell for up to $30,000 per canvas.

I am not qualified to determine whether his art is good enough to command such prices. I do know that he has trouble selling smaller works for $200 to those who pass by him and his dog each afternoon while they sit outside the van catching fresh air and sunshine.

I don't know how his journey will end, but from my perspective, his prospects do not look promising. For now, his health is adequate. But he acknowledges that this will eventually change. He doesn't like to discuss, or think about, what will happen when he is no longer capable of living in the van, and possibly in need of substantive medical care.

Change is also in the wind on our increasingly crowded block. Like much of the rest of San Francisco, this South of Market neighborhood is gentrifying at warp speed. Most of the streetside homeless people who hung out in this neighborhood in years recently passed have been discreetly removed via the auspices of a largely covert program coordinated by the city government and the Chamber of Commerce. Others have succumbed to alcohol, drugs and untreated illnesses.

Local real estate prices are heading skyward throughout this section of town. The rooming houses and low-rent apartments that used to proliferate here have been eliminated. The low-income, working-class people who resided in such quarters in this neighborhood for nearly 50 years are pretty much all gone. Wealthy retirees from the suburbs are replacing such people.

The neighborhood is also being infiltrated by high-earning, young professionals associated with the high tech firms that are snapping up business properties throughout San Francisco's South of Market district. And it is just a matter of time before the old man who lives in the van with his dog will be forced to seek another block somewhere else to spend their sunny afternoons.

Given the desperate circumstances described above, I have no idea where he will go, or eventually end up.

After A Painting

"Wet Night on Sutter Street"

by Claire J. Baker

A worn umbrella just in case,
but this night there's no downpour.
In size to shield the legs or face
a worn umbrella blown or placed
near a sleeper bracing to brace
for routing from store-front door.
An old umbrella, just in case.
But this night there's no downpour.

* *Painting by Christine Hanlon from Street Spirit, March 2010*



"WET NIGHT ON SUTTER STREET." Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on canvas, 20" by 32 1/3"

From A Young Street Poet

by Claire J. Baker

Though I'm poor & look like hell
the full moon nourished by
reflected sun, finds me and
feeds my wayward spirit well.

I've the moon, I can't complain.
The moon is never mean
to poets. And to wash the
night air clean, there's wind & rain.

In Downtown San Francisco

by Claire J. Baker

The Transamerica Building
designed to bend & flex
in earthquakes — all that

golden shimmer & angular shape
swaying, settling back down:
if only the same

for street people
swaying under the earthquakes
of their lives.

In Our America

by Sue Ellen Pector

Clothed in pristine flags of stars, they craft
utensils of starvation, hammers of poverty,
welcome-mats of homelessness.

In our America,
haughty captains of capital
curse the open-palmed,
tear-stained, hungry.

Stopping

by Joan Clair

I stop for the sacred
which has stopped for me
in the form of a flower or a tree
or a homeless person on the street.

In the unknowable Mystery,
who stops for whom?

She Sends Silent Hope

by Sue Ellen Pector

Homeless in the snow
two men, one dog
beneath the bridge.
A small girl, awake past bedtime,
watches through her window.
Nestled in blankets, she sends silent hope
to the dog far below,
beside the men huddled at a steel drum's fire.
Sensing her hope, the dog looks
up at her glowing warm window and howls.
Icicles drip from a shed's roof and
the girl dreams.

Inspired by "Under Bridges" by Eric Drooker from the July issue of *Street Spirit*

TENNIS SHOES

by Claire J. Baker

We saved your tennis shoes —
faded blue, run-over sides,
worn rubber peeling off.

White paint flecks the blue
like crushed stars. We finger
the tread. You were not

a winner on the tennis courts
or the court of last resort.
Now you are taken.

We place on your pillow
these battered sneakers
from your last summer.

Stockton Tunnel Letter Writer

by George Wynn

I don't know
his name or where
he was from
His speeding pen
on blue paper
tablet in
Stockton Tunnel
sparked my curiosity
and when he
looked up at me
with exhausted eye
after midnight
and said, "I
knew right away
when I walked
out on her, I'd
screwed up,"
I understood
the narrative
of his life.

Warped

by Sue Ellen Pector

No safe place to live,
how many homeless humans die
while the housed avert gazes,
tossing a coin or two.

Fear has so warped people that
they birth bombs even
as they refuse to house humans.

Turning Fifty

by George Wynn

She's the Springsteen
"Born to Run" kind
short on rest
finds a job anywhere
and everywhere
falls in love with every
down and out stray cat
and on her birthday
she's in a soup kitchen
lifting the spirits
of the dispossessed.

The Way

by Sue Ellen Pector

Antidote despair, shimmering moon.

Beam blessings to me, ancestors,
that my path may be illumined
by your wisdom, love and guidance.

May good omens greet me,
allies blaze trails to my door.

May dogsong enlighten my life.

Let peace show me the way in this dark.

A SHORT LIFE

(anyone you know?)

by Claire J. Baker

He believed in clouds
of gliding from gold
to gray to white —

believed in raindrops
on wing tips
glittering like stars.

He flew above us, carving
the blue into pieces
we might more easily ply.

Like a bird he lived
a short life. But, world,
what he could see so high.

the dispractice of heaven

by Randy Fingland

never bestowed
a Cadillac
on a stranger
because what
I really have
to share is questionable
since I'm without
financial resources

but there's reason
to believe
I deserve the air I breathe
the water I drink
& there's no question
this food is mine
if I'm willing to settle
for what I can get —
I'm not complaining
(or am I?) —

where I've arrived
in this dispossession
is to trust no longer
dreams that betterment
awaits but today
is as good as it is

The Rush-Around

by Joan Clair

"The faster we go, the more we leave ourselves behind.... We are too 'busy' to be human."
— Joan Chittister

If someone has not a minute to spare
of their busyness life, beware.
Retreat to where you meet Supreme Being.

Don't feel worthless through lives on the run,
gusts of wind rushing past your life's sound,
the sight of you given the rush-around.

If you're homeless and on the street,
don't take the rush-around personally.
The "busyness bodies" are full of hot air;
they'll answer the phone,
then have no time to spare.
Give them a dial tone.
Don't feel alone.

Homeless, or homed,
the Supreme Being is never rushed,
never above the humble caller.
Be aware.

Resurrection

by Claire J. Baker

May you
arrive at
resurrection
not by dying
but by LIVING.
May the end
begin a
beginning.

who's extinct?

by Randy Fingland

privatization =
corporatization =
degradation =
globalization =
genocidization =
profitization =
chemicalization =
civilization checkmate =
planet reconstructs =
military-industrial complex death